

Black Glass

by Sherry

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Summary: Utterly ridiculous Draco/Hermione. Was I out of my senses?

1. first bite

> <meta> Black Glass 1

Black Glass I - First Bite

- former maniac of SSC

A/N : Yes, this is the promised Dracofic... it will replace The Haunting for a while... because I am enamoured with Draco... Anyway, no worries, Alohomora 3 is being written... not like anyone cares, anyway. And please send me ideas for it (Alohomora) because I'm kind of lost here. My email is in my bio or something. SSC is my dearly beloved school (blech). I am obsessed with black glass. It's the title of a novel I'm writing right now. The plot stuff comes in in the next installment, although the Draco thing in this is part of it already. In this story I'm trying not to do too much Pansy-bashing, which everyone does. Don't get me wrong, I don't like her, but I think the Slytherins ought to be given a chance...

Disclaimer : No one you recognise belongs to me...

Draco headed towards the stairs very slowly, so that he would not be heard. His silver-blond hair shone in the moonlight from the window, and his grey eyes turned silver from the side. He went up the long spiralling flight of stairs to the Astronomy tower, wincing at every creak. His hair, which needed cutting, was touching the collar of his robes like small silver ferns. Most of the girls in Slytherin found this teasing and rather saucy, and surrounded him like subjects. He had an air of danger and mystery that appealed to girls in, oh, every house, with his defiantly longish hair, smooth, pointed face and superior attitude. If they had known that he was escaping, now, to this place of solitude, they would have laughed their heads off.

He was halfway up, and stopped for breath, feeling a cool breeze lift his hair and set it back down. He smoothed a hand over his silver-blond locks protectively, glancing around. He thought he heard footsteps and moved a little faster, although he knew that there was no one to hear him at this moonlit hour.

The top was nearing him - or was he nearing the top? Draco smirked at himself for even thinking that kind of idiotic phrase, and climbed into the Astronomy tower as soundlessly as he had exited his common-room earlier. The stars were very bright, and the moon shone cold on the castle. Draco looked around, and jumped in shock as he realised he was not alone.

Leaning on one of the railings, poring over a thick Astronomy book, stood a person clad in robes.

Clapping a hand over his mouth to stifle a gasp, Draco moved silently back towards the stairs, staring at the person - the girl. However, as he turned around, he could not help looking at her. Her long hair without the hat, let down over her shoulders, gave her an air of total unassuming innocence, and Draco tried not to imagine what her eyes would look like. Her hand, moving over the pages, was very pale. It occurred to Draco that he should go, and he put one foot on the stairs.

The stair emitted a loud creak, and the studying girl turned around. It was Hermione Granger.

Draco's expression turned from one of caution and surprise to a smirk. It was a sort of defence reaction, and he straightened out his face almost immediately. It was too late - she had seen the smirk, and her expression turned cold. 'What are you doing here?' she asked, in a tone that boded no greeting.

He smiled at her, a kind of neutral smile. The smile he usually gave her and her friends was a smirk, a superior grin, or sometimes a hateful forced smile. This time he was unsure of what to think. She did not smile back. 'I might ask what you are doing here,' he said.

'I was here first,' she said childishly. 'And I was studying, for your information.'

Draco nodded, fixing her with that strange smile. He saw her shiver and grinned inwardly, but said in a mock-polite voice, 'Always the good little student, aren't you? Don't let me disturb you.' Turning to go, he put his foot on the creaky stair again, mentally vowing to get revenge on it somehow.

'You haven't told me why you're here yet.'

He turned around, genuinely surprised this time. 'Anything wrong with wanting a little solitude? This seemed like the perfect place. I was wrong, as usual.' If it hadn't been midnight and if the moonlight hadn't been illuminating her robed figure with the long hair down her back, he would have snapped, 'Got a problem?' Even now he was having a hard time keeping back his usual sarcastic crack about 'Potty and the Weasel'.

Hermione laughed without smiling. 'No one's stopping you,' she told

him. 'Do what you like. Just don't distract me.'

You bet I'm going to distract you, Draco thought to himself, smirking.

She turned back to her book after one last glance at him. Draco came up beside her after a few seconds and leant over the railing as well, looking out at the stars, as he was accustomed to. Out there he didn't need to be a Slytherin, didn't need to live up to his father's expectations. He could be anything he liked. Of course, sometimes he did like being a Slytherin. Heck, he loved it most of the time. But on certain occasions, up in his dormitory alone, it was as though a crushing wave was bearing down upon him, and he climbed up to the tower o' nights to escape reality for a while.

'What are you studying now?' he asked her, peering over her shoulder.

'Constellations. Stars,' was the somewhat muffled reply. Draco suddenly wanted to... well, he didn't know just what it was. He just felt strange. He looked into the book without seeing what was in it.

'Interesting,' he remarked in a bland tone. 'And which one would you be studying?'

'Sirius,' Hermione replied, her tone softening slightly. 'The Dog Star. And Orion, as a whole.'

Draco smirked yet again, and had to straighten out his face. Sirius! 'Reminds me of someone I once knew,' he said. 'The Dog star...'

There was a sharp crack. Hermione's hand had connected with his pale peaked face, and a red mark appeared on his white cheek. She paused, a hot flush creeping up her neck, and turned back to her book abruptly. 'Don't you dare speak like that again,' she said, in a voice that was more tremulous than angry.

They stood in silence for about fifteen minutes, Hermione feverishly looking up the names of stars, and Draco just staring. He realised that out here it was all different, that they would go back to hating each other the next morning. Or, rather, he would go back to hating her the next morning. Because he certainly didn't hate her right then.

'We should go back down,' Hermione said uncertainly. 'It'll be morning soon.'

'Yes,' Draco replied, also uncertainly.

They stood there still, neither wanting to move. Draco's eyes were fixed on the Dog Star. As soon as he realised that, he turned away in disgust, and looked at Hermione, who was to his surprise staring up at him.

'Something wrong?' he asked nonchalantly, and walked over to the stairs. She gathered up her book and came after him, both of them stepping carefully over the creaking boards. Their descent was much more cheerful than Draco's solitary ascent had been, as the tension

had all but vanished. Hermione slipped over a loose board and Draco put out a hand to steady her.

They parted ways after they had climbed down all the way, and Draco slipped back to his common room, his mood decidedly more light-hearted than it had been when he had slipped out. He whispered the password and went to his dormitory, where he fell asleep at once amid the droning snores of Crabbe and Goyle.

The next morning, as Draco headed down to breakfast, he thought rather irrationally of Hermione. Flanked by Crabbe and Goyle, he sat down at the breakfast table and looked across at the Gryffindors. There she was, with 'Potty and the Weasel', as Draco had labelled them, and she was looking over at him. Draco quickly looked down at his plate, and Goyle looked at him in puzzlement, just as stupid as he always was. 'Something wrong?' he asked.

'No,' Draco said, running his fingers through his wispy hair. 'Nothing at all.'

They ate as the owls came in with the morning post, and there was a box of sweets for Draco; he put it next to his plate, giving one to Goyle and Crabbe each. Pansy Parkinson, who was smiling at him, asked him for one too, and Draco handed it over impassively. He felt neither like nor dislike for the girl, who was always hanging onto him. He felt a kind of compassion for her, being so unattractive, unlike some of the Slytherin girls who were attractive in a rather more revealing way than some of the teachers would have liked. Blaise Zabini, for one, had long dark hair and blue eyes like dark mysterious pools. You could never tell what she was going to do next. Most of the Slytherin boys, including Draco at one time, _thought_ they were madly in love with her(!).

'You look tired, Draco,' Pansy remarked, brushing back her hair. 'Are you all right?'

'Yeah,' Draco said. 'I'm fine.' Pansy had always been very nice to him, and he had been nice to her in a way, although always impersonal. Now she smiled at him over the breakfast table, and looked down at her plate. Draco's gaze wandered over to Hermione again, and this time she wasn't looking at him; she was looking at Ron, who was telling her a joke. Draco gazed at her from under hooded lids, and said nothing.

'What's so interesting about the Gryffindors, Draco?' said Pansy with a sharp-eyed glance towards Hermione. 'And the little Mudblood Granger?'

'Nothing much,' Draco said calmly, turning back to Pansy, 'except that they all look like dorks.' He felt no difference whatsoever saying this, although he expected to. _Nope_, _same old Draco_, he thought to himself with relief, as he heard Pansy giggle.

'For a moment there I thought you looked interested,' she said. Draco pushed his hair back from his peaked face and smiled the strange hypnotising neutral smile that he had just discovered the other night. It had the same effect on Pansy as on Hermione, only rather more pronounced. She shivered pleasantly, her eyes not leaving his face. Draco rather enjoyed having this effect on the Slytherin girls, not to mention Granger.

'What's our first class today?' Pansy asked.

'Double Potions with the Gryffindors,' Draco replied.

Pansy wrinkled up her nose. 'Possibly my least favourite subject,' she said. 'Snape doesn't like me very much. I'm not too good at it. Not as good as you.'

'Oh, you'll be OK,' Draco told her. 'If you need anything you can ask me.'

Pansy shivered again as he smiled that neutral smile. It seemed to suggest that he had a double nature, a halved face, one half angelic goodness and the other mystery and darkness. Save her with one hand and destroy her with the other. It was no wonder that about half the entire house had a crush on the slender sixteen-year-old. Pansy, for one, had always adored him, and although she knew he probably didn't like her back, there was still a chance, she thought. He had always smiled at her, unlike some of the Slytherin boys who found her extremely unattractive and jeered at her. Yes, he was cruel, but Pansy felt that he was a nice person. A rare quality in a Slytherin boy like Draco.

The sixth-year Gryffindors and Slytherins headed towards Potions, and Snape greeted them frostily. Draco quite liked the frosty teacher, who was actually very nice under his rough exterior. Draco had found this out during a certain incident in his fourth year with the teacher. He sat down with Crabbe and Goyle, and Pansy sat in the back elbow to elbow with the two Slytherin boys patrolling Blaise Zabini. She didn't look too comfortable. Blaise had had her eye on Draco for a while, and up till that morning, he had quite liked it. Now he wasn't quite sure what he thought of it.

'You will all need partners for this morning's work,' Snape informed them, casting a glance around the dungeon classroom with a rather nasty grin. 'Shall I choose for you, or shall you choose them yourselves?'

A mutter of dissension amongst the students meant that they would rather have him stay out of their business.

'It doesn't really matter what you think,' said Snape with another nasty grin. 'I'm going to let you choose... for now... in an orderly fashion, I beg of you. Otherwise, I shall be pairing the Slytherins with the Gryffindors.'

The students got up and began to move about, choosing partners. Harry Potter and Ron Weasley paired off, as usual, and Crabbe and Goyle paired off as well. Pansy was trying to move over to Draco, but was blocked by the two Slytherin boys, who were fighting over Blaise Zabini. She in her turn was moving towards Draco. He shivered unpleasantly and looked around at a loose end.

'You seem to be taking rather a long time choosing,' Snape said to Neville Longbottom, a round-, fresh-faced boy whom no one wanted to pick because of his accident-prone reputation. 'You can partner Parkinson - make it snappy.' Neville, an absolutely terrified expression on his face, moved towards Pansy, who was frowning slightly and looking over at Draco. Snape paired up Milicent

Bulstrode and one of the Slytherin boys fighting over Blaise. Then as he looked around, he realised that the only people left without a partner were Blaise Zabini, the Slytherin boy who was acting like her bodyguard, Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy.

Blaise walked up to Draco and asked him in her musical, dark, voice, whether he would like to partner her. The rest of the class were beginning to arrange their scales and cauldrons. Draco refused politely with that neutral grin he loved, and winked at the Slytherin boy, who winked back. Then he looked over at Hermione, who had obviously been trying to decide between the lesser of three evils.

'Shall we sit?' he asked, and without a word they sat down together and began to arrange their apparatus like the rest of the class. Snape shot Draco a puzzled look, as did the rest of the class, and proceeded to explain the lesson of the day.

'Today,' he said, fixing his eyes on the class, 'we will be learning the Polyjuice Potion.'

A/N 2: Ah, yes, the plot. ::searching around in her Plot Bag:: Hmmm, it is rather warped I grant you, but it contains - or will contain - Tom Riddle, Voldemort, Lucius Malfoy, Dobby and many, many more... The next part will probably be done by Taylor. Review, please!

2. lightning

> <meta> Black Glass II

Black Glass II - Lightning

- guess. Just guess.

A/N : My second installment. Please review! A good review just makes me so happy :). Oh well, the plot comes in. Polyjuice Potion is not too good if taken internally... ::smirk:: No flames please.

Disclaimer: I love those guys. I wish they were mine. I'm whacko. Peace out.

Draco and Hermione looked at each other. Surely they wouldn't have to drink that stuff? Draco had a hard time keeping his face straight; his customary smirk was threatening to make an appearance. He didn't really know why he cared about not smirking right now. Surely he didn't care about the opinion of a Mudblood? He stared at Hermione, who was blushing a furious red, and wondered why. Across the room, 'Potty and the Weasel' were doing the same. He had to bite his tongue to keep from muttering a very rude remark.

'I have gone to great lengths to get the ingredients for you,' Snape told them. 'You can look it up in your notes. It turns you into a carbon copy of the person whom the potion is specific to. It is painful, I'll grant you that.' There were murmurs of alarm amongst the student body, and Snape frowned. 'I'm not going to make you drink it, for heaven's sakes, come on, just mix it. It takes a long time to make, which is why you need a partner. I have prepared everything for you - even stewing lacewings. All you have to do is

mix the potion. Now I want no more accidents, Longbottom.' He began to instruct them on how to mix the potion, and Draco noticed that Hermione was going twice as fast as normal. He asked her why, snidely, of course, and she shook her head and muttered something on his not being too smart.

That, of course, provoked Draco, who said snidely, 'Characteristic of Mudbloods - always knowing everything.'

There was another sharp crack, and Draco rubbed his cheek once again as Hermione lowered her hand, glaring. 'Don't you call me a Mudblood, you - you,' she hissed, 'you - son of a rat! At least my family loves me.'

It was Draco's turn to feel like slapping her, but boys didn't slap girls, at least not where he was brought up, and he shot her a look fit to kill. 'Oh, you would know a lot about my family, wouldn't you?' he hissed in return. 'Especially since yours happens to be absolutely perfect? In a family whose motto is probably 'Blood is a whole lot thicker than water?' That had been very nasty, and he half regretted it, but there was no turning back. Hermione's eyes burned with a cold fire. Her face was flushed slightly, and her hair was peeking out under the hat she wore. Her mouth tightened ever so slightly. Draco thought to himself with an impious grin that he liked it when she was angry.

They did not speak to each other for the rest of the Potions class. Draco's slender fingers sorted out the ingredients and shoved them at Hermione, who collected them, glowering. Neville upset his half-full cauldron, and they jumped back just in time for Snape to clear it up, grumbling.

Finally the cauldrons were bubbling and the potion was ready; Snape inspected them carefully, and helped the students put some of the potion into vials. 'Add a hair of your head to the potion,' he instructed them. 'Then it will be ready. Be very careful... do NOT spill anything...' He glared at Neville.

Draco pulled out a strand of silver-blond hair and dropped it in; the potion turned ice-blue. Hermione's turned a darker shade of blue, and they stared at their vials in horror. Hermione had turned rather green; Draco stared at her in surprise. They both put down their vials in the middle of the table, Draco trying to suppress an insult. It came despite his efforts.

'I never knew Mudbloods were squeamish as well as thick-heads,' he said.

That did it. Hermione reached over to slap him, but suddenly a bolt of green light shot from Draco's hand and hit her on the temple. She collapsed on the floor in a limp pile of robes.

After that there was utter confusion. Snape transported her to the infirmary on a stretcher, and the other students clustered around Draco, some accusing, some cheering and a few just plain puzzled. Draco stared at his hand in disbelief. There was a lightning-shaped burn mark on the palm, and it hurt. He certainly hadn't meant to do that. Hadn't even tried to do that.

'What have you done to her, you - you -' Ron Weasley was sputtering.

Harry was trying to hold him back, as he was trying as hard as he could to break free and hit Draco in the face. 'How dare you?'

In a while Snape returned with the headmaster and Professor McGonagall, who looked thoroughly harassed. They took Draco away to an empty classroom, and the others were told to get on with their studies. Draco stared at his hand, horrified and shocked. Who - what - had done this to her?

'Did you do this on purpose, Draco?'

'No, sir, I - I didn't,' Draco stuttered. 'I - it just came out, sir.' He showed Dumbledore the burn mark on his palm, and the headmaster peered at it down his long, crooked nose.

'Dark magic,' he said, his voice heavy with strain. 'There was word of this...'

'Was my father involved?' Draco asked, and then bit his tongue; it had slipped out. He felt very weak, very drained somehow.

Dumbledore shrugged expressively. 'I believe - for now, Mr. Malfoy - that you had no part in this, and I believe, as well, that your father - and the Dark Lord - are very much involved, in this and the plot that is rising for the Dark to take over the land.'

Draco gasped, fingering the burn mark on his palm. 'Is Hermione all right?' he asked, his tone softening. He wanted to apologise, and see how she was. He had been rather nasty to her in Potions.

'You may see her, if you wish to,' Dumbledore said. 'There is a lot of explaining to do. She is still unconscious, but Madam Pomfrey says that she may awaken any moment. The spell you used on her was not very powerful. Perhaps... it would be better if you explained it to her.' He took the shivering boy down to the infirmary.

'Hermione?'

Draco's breath was ragged as he looked down at the limp figure on the bed. She looked as though she was asleep, and there was a burn mark identical to Draco's on her left temple. Dumbledore left them quietly, but Madam Pomfrey sat in a far corner of the infirmary, mending something. Draco felt strange. She looked so helpless... and he had done this to her. Draco stared once again at his palm, and at the burn mark that spread across it. It hurt like the dickens.

'Hermione?'

There was the faintest flutter of her long brown lashes. He put out a hand tentatively and brushed away a few loose strands of hair that had fallen over her pale, white face. Her features stood out sharply against the paleness of her skin and her hair spread over the pillow. Draco traced the burn mark with his fingers very gently. It was smooth and cold, unlike ordinary burns. His felt the same, but he didn't want to touch it because it hurt.

'Hermione... wake up.'

Her eyelids fluttered, then pulled open. Her brown eyes widened at the sight of Draco, standing over her with a strange expression on his face. 'What - what...' she struggled to remember why her temple hurt. 'What happened?'

Draco lifted his hand to show her the lightning mark.

'_Oh_...' She sat up like a bolt, then winced. 'You did this to me! What were you trying to do, kill me?' She stared at him accusingly, and his eyes narrowed slightly as he drew back his hand to look at the mark.

'I wasn't trying to kill you,' he snapped. 'Merely maim you for a month or two.'

She shot him an if-looks-could-kill glare.

'All right, all right.' He sighed. 'Hermione, I really didn't mean for this to happen. I'm sorry'

'Yeah. So you expect me to believe that a bolt of deadly light shot from your hand - by accident?'

Draco fixed her with a look. 'As a matter of fact, that is exactly what happened,' he said frostily. 'I can promise you, Hermione... I - I never meant to hurt you. It just... _happened_. Dumbledore believes me ... and he says that he thinks the Dark Lord and my father are involved in this as well. I'm sorry you got hurt, but I want you to believe me - I didn't have a hand in this.'

'Ha, ha, ha,' Hermione cracked sarcastically, rubbing her temple tenderly. 'As if the Dark Lord would be involved in a matter including a ... _Mudblood_.' She winced. 'Ouch.'

On an impulse, Draco bent over her and ran his fingers over the mark. 'Does it really hurt? Do you want me to get Madam Pomfrey?' Hermione shivered slightly. '_No_,' she said, but not as frostily as she had intended it to be. Draco looked very strange bending over her with an unrecognisable expression on his face and in his wide eyes fringed with pale lashes. What was it? Then it hit her - he actually looked concerned. His hair was somewhat disheveled. Hermione had a strange impulse to reach up and smooth it down, which she did rather tentatively. He flushed for a moment, then regained composure, drawing away from her slightly.

'Will you be all right?' he asked matter-of-factly, although the look on his face was still strange. 'Dumbledore says the spell that I - that hurt you - was very weak.'

'I feel fine,' said Hermione softly. 'Just very... weak.'

'Yeah, me too,' Draco said with a slight shudder. His eyes were almost completely silver in the light. 'Well, I'd better be going... take care.' He sighed, turning to go. His hair was still slightly awry, fringing his collar. He moved to the door, turned and smiled at her. Hermione shivered, wondering if this slender, pale boy was actually mixed up with Voldemort. She hoped not... he had looked almost human just now. Almost. There was something about Draco that seemed supernatural, from his ever-so-slightly pointed ears, silver eyes and defiant air. She shivered again, remembering the burst of

green light that had hit her before the darkness.

Hermione watched him go out of the infirmary, and put her hand up to her face to feel the scar that he had left. Out of the darkness she thought she heard a murmur, 'Next time, Mudblood, next time.'

It was only imagination, she told herself, and lay down to sleep.

A/N: Hope you liked that... ::digs in Sherry's plot bag:: Sherry, you are so messy! Oh well, please take the time to review... I rewrote this three times, can you believe it? At first I wanted to change Draco into Hermione and add a crystal ball, but that sucked so badly I took it out. Sherry is enamoured with Draco. ::snickers:: The next part will come soon. Please, I beg of you, don't get tired of me.

3. persuasion

> <meta> Black Glass III

Black Glass III - Persuasion

- me, myself and Taylor

A/N: Third installment... Hermione has got to recover, right? And Draco has got to be visited by Voldemort, right? What, wrong? Grrr! ::ahem:: Ah well, as I am so fond of saying, please review after you read. It really makes my day. And motivates me to finish the story. Did you know that Lucius means light? ::snort:: They're trying to win him over to the Dark Side... my poor Draco... ::sniff:: The allusion to 'sinister hand' applies to the left hand in general, not the fact that Draco was sinister! :) The left hand is said to be the sinister hand...

Disclaimer: If I had them all on a desert island with me and J.K. Rowling came along to take them away, I wouldn't be able to do anything...

Lucius Malfoy sat in the Dark Arts room at a faded mahogany desk, thinking. It was dingy and dark, but it served its purpose. There were portraits of Dark Wizards on the walls, and numerous apparatus on the shelves. He had concentrated all his power in helping one of the Dark Wizards - a wizard who happened to be in hiding.

With a sigh, Lucius got up and faced a certain portrait. A young boy, black-haired, with a malevolent expression on his face. This was Tom Riddle, the soon-to-be greatest Dark Lord of all time. Lucius clapped his hands twice and muttered a stream of strange-sounding words, pointing at the picture. The spell took almost no time for him, a practiced Dark Wizard.

The portrait's edges became blurred and it seemed as though drops of water were running down it. Then a carbon copy of the picture stepped out of the frame and into the dusty room. It was Tom Riddle himself. Only part of Voldemort, and yet so powerful. Lucius had summoned him from the portrait to ask a question. Although he wouldn't have admitted it aloud, he preferred Tom to Voldemort, because Tom was more of a friend than a master, whereas Voldemort was a master in all

ways.

'Morning, Lucius,' the boy drawled lazily.

'Good morning, Tom,' Lucius returned, sitting down again. 'How is the boy?'

Tom Riddle straightened up, a gleam of interest in his eye. 'You should have told him about it during the vacation,' he chided Lucius. 'I shall have to do some hard... er, persuading.' His grin was almost manic. 'I have always enjoyed the fine art of persuasion. You do realise that the boy will eventually have to join us. If he isn't for us, he's against us.'

Lucius let out a sigh, folding his hands together. He looked very much like his son, with the same pale hair and features, although he was more filled out than the slender boy. 'Yes, I did realise that... but he is different, Tom. He has this strange gene... compassion.'

The tall boy wrinkled his nose rather crossly. 'Ah yes, that gene. It exists in many of us, but not you and me, eh, Lucius? We'll just have to win him over. I tried to kill the Granger Mudblood - the one he is always complaining about - through him, but it was difficult, as something in him was holding him back. Most probably he is only weak, like you were at first. There is a bond now, between them - their marks.' He scowled. 'I'm sure he can feel it, being your son. I find him very promising. He shows this steely strength at times that can be very useful... I have great plans for him, and am therefore prepared to be patient...' He gave a small chuckle. 'Now we must try harder than ever to win him over. Maybe it will take no more than a personal appearance by me... I can be very - frightening, you know.' He grinned devilishly. 'Did you ever wonder why he has never seen me before?'

Lucius stretched out his fingers, flexing them, picked up a pen and began to twirl it. 'I am guessing that you thought he wasn't up to it,' he replied, returning the grin. 'You need to win him over at the right time.'

'Precisely. Actually, you should have tried to teach him from birth... never sent him to that wreck of a school. It has really gone downhill, has it not?'

'Indeed.' Lucius screwed up a ball of paper. 'That old fool of a Dumbledore... and Snape. We had him for a while, didn't we?'

'He broke away. Needed to do what is right.' Tom laughed. 'Two old crackpots. Personally I've always admired the McGonagall woman - very spunky. The Granger girl seems to be a favourite of hers.' He frowned. 'It could be a drawback, because I intend to dispose of her very soon. She is becoming too close to Draco. The woman could get very protective. Ah well, anyone know any good chat-up lines?'

Lucius gave a short laugh. 'Just don't go too quickly, Tom,' he advised the boy. 'Draco is very sensitive. He won't listen if you push him too hard. I did try to teach him when he was younger, but he began to scream in his sleep - a bad sign. He wouldn't listen to me.'

'Oh, people always listen to me,' Tom said.

'You need your rest, dear. You were hit by Dark Magic! You need to lie back.' Madam Pomfrey dabbed the lightning mark on Hermione's temple with a wet cloth. Hermione moved restlessly, her hand inching under her pillow towards the book she had hidden there, a book that Ron had brought down for her with many complaints. Her burn hurt badly.

'I'm fine, Madam Pomfrey,' Hermione groaned. 'I'll be fine. May I please return to class?'

'You have visitors, dear,' Madam Pomfrey told her. 'Three today.' Hermione sat up in bed, and was pushed back down by the stern matron. 'Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and... Draco Malfoy.' Her face darkened at the mention of Draco. 'Isn't Malfoy the one who hit you, dear?'

'Yes, but -'

Hermione was cut short by the appearance of three boys in the doorway. Ron was shooting glares at Draco, who was completely expressionless, and Harry looked very concerned. Hermione's face lit up at the sight of her two friends. 'Harry! Ron!' she called. The three of them ran to her and stood by her bed, while Madam Pomfrey finished up and watched them with a disapproving cluck.

'Are you all right, Hermione?' Harry asked, staring at the lightning scar that resembled his own and shooting a look at Draco, who held up his palm without saying anything at all. Ron grinned worriedly at her, and reached out to touch the mark gingerly. They had brought her some sweets, supplied by Fred and George.

'We came as soon as we could,' Ron explained. 'Professor McGonagall gave us permission.' Harry handed her another book, which Hermione took gratefully and stowed under her pillow for safekeeping. Draco smiled at her dispassionately. She smiled at all three of them, while Harry and Ron shot angry glances at Draco and examined her burn mark worriedly.

'You'll take care, won't you, Hermione?' Harry asked, and Ron fiercely stated that he'd make sure she did. Hermione hugged both of them with the assurance that she would be back in class very soon. Draco said nothing at all, except that he hoped she would recover soon, and Ron glared at him with narrow eyes.

'You had better watch your back, Malfoy,' Ron hissed.

Suddenly Hermione said, 'Draco.'

'What?'

'Draco. His name's Draco.' She earned herself peculiar glances from Harry and Ron. Draco's eyes flashed, although Hermione could never tell whether he was pleased or angry.

'Thank you ever so much,' she amended. 'I'll see you later.' Harry and Ron waved goodbye to her, lingering, then shot out of the infirmary at a yell from Madam Pomfrey.

To Hermione's surprise, Draco stayed. 'What do you want?' she asked him, not unkindly. He drew a breath, opened his mouth, and then closed it.

'I can't remember,' he said smoothly, his face showing no expression at all. 'Thank you, Hermione. I hope you recover soon.' He turned towards the door, and then came back. Hermione stared at him wonderingly as he lifted the hand with the burn mark and placed it on her left temple, so the two lightning bolts were in line. And then she felt a current of electricity as the marks joined, and she gasped despite herself. Draco was shaking as well, but he kept the signs in line, and just as suddenly the current stopped. Madam Pomfrey was hurrying over towards them.

'Draco Malfoy,' she yelled, 'this patient NEEDS - HER - REST. Visiting time is over!'

Ignoring her, Draco lifted his left hand - his sinister hand - and showed her the mark on the palm. Hermione realised with a start that her mark had ceased to hurt. And Draco's mark was no longer dark and jagged, but smooth and pale. She put a hand up to touch hers, wonderingly. 'How did you do that?' she whispered.

'I - I saw my mother doing that once,' Draco whispered in return. 'I - I don't really know what happened. Goodbye, Hermione,' he whispered, and went out quietly.

Hermione felt her mark, wondering.

That night as Draco lay in his bed in the Slytherin dorm, he couldn't sleep. Confused images floated before his eyes. His mother, whom he hardly ever saw. His father, who was half cruel and half kind. Hermione, for whom he was beginning to have mixed feelings... 'No...' he groaned. 'Stop it.'

'Do you really want that to happen, Draco?

The pale-haired boy sat up in bed suddenly. 'Who's there?' he called, his voice shaky. And a form began to materialise at the foot of the bed. It was a dark-haired boy, a boy with sharp, malevolent eyes and handsome features. Draco frowned, recognising it vaguely.

'Draco, I am Tom Riddle,' the apparition said, becoming solid and real and taking a seat on the edge of the bed.

'Tom - Riddle,' Draco gasped, and then, regaining composure, said, 'I should have thought that Tom Riddle would have better things to do than to skulk around the foot of my bed in the middle of the night.' He twisted his slender fingers together. 'What do you want with me? Father often talked of you.'

Tom Riddle laughed devilishly. Draco shuddered, raising an eyebrow with a snide expression. 'I want you to join me, Draco,' the boy said. He was not much older than Draco himself, and resembled Harry Potter in a way - Draco smirked, then straightened out his face reluctantly. 'I want you to join us. Your father and myself. You will be the next Dark Lord, Draco. I have no descendants.'

'Ha, ha,' said Draco composedly, although inside he was shaking. 'Me,

the next Dark Lord? Think again.'

'It is true,' said Riddle, coming up closer to Draco and speaking in his ear. 'You could be great, you could have power. You could rule the world - finally get one over on the Potter boy.' At the mention of that name, Riddle's lip curled. 'All you have to do is do what I tell you to. Your father and I will instruct you.'

Draco was tempted. It sounded good. He had been brought up in a very Dark environment, which showed in his outward cruelty. 'I might,' he replied.

'Good,' Tom replied. 'You will. Come with me.' He took Draco's hand, and at the touch of his hand a sharp pain burned in the mark on Draco's hand. Draco pulled his hand back and ran his fingers over the mark on the palm.

'Did you have anything to do with Hermione?' he asked abruptly. 'With that spell I cast at her? Was it you?'

Tom rubbed his hands together delightedly. 'You are intelligent; I'll give you that. Yes, of course I did. I want you to kill her now, yourself. Come.' And Draco found himself in the infirmary, next to a sleeping Hermione. Tom clapped him on the shoulder, and Draco raised his wand as though in a trance.

'No, I can't,' he muttered, dropping his arm.

'You can,' Riddle said, smiling at him evilly. 'You can. You can and you will. This is a first step, Draco. A first step to the many Mudbloods you could kill. A first step to the many you will overcome. First her, then "Potty and the Weasel",' Draco laughed uncertainly, 'and then Hogwarts. Then, my dear boy, we will have the world.' He raised Draco's arm once again in his firm grip, and Draco was poised over Hermione, ready to strike.

'I - I don't know the spell,' he said, his thoughts confused. He did want to rule the world - he did want to get rid of Potter - but could he kill? Kill someone?

'Your father taught it to you over vacation,' Riddle said. Draco remembered. His father had drilled him endlessly, and he had learnt a few spells by heart. 'Now will you do it?' The force of the question struck Draco like a bullet to the heart.

'Yes,' Draco said. 'Yes, I will.'

He raised his arm for the third time, determined. He looked at Hermione, lying helpless on the bed. Her white face, her long lashes, her brown hair that spread across the pillow. One arm was thrown up over the covers. She looked so innocent that a pang struck Draco through the heart. Could he actually be such a beast as to kill this girl? Hermione? She could be anyone's child. She could be anyone's daughter. She could be anyone's sister. His mind reeled. Tom saw it, and hissed in his ear.

'Do it!'

And Draco, desperate, began to mumble the words of the deadly incantation.

A/N: Ooh, a cliffhanger... a lousy one... Hope you didn't hate that too much... Keep reading please, I will be putting the next part up pretty soon... even I don't know what will happen next. Maybe Hermione will be the first to die. Please, please, I beg of you, review. I'm beginning to live off reviews. This morning I reread my reviews and skipped breakfast. I am getting too absorbed in this tale...

4. counting crows

> <meta> Black Glass IV

Black Glass IV - Counting Crows

- Sherry and Taylor, et al

A/N: Well... I really hope you all enjoy this... please, please review after you read. I love reviews. The 'black glass' thing comes in here, I **think**... it is SO much worse than the other part. Read on! I'm sorry it took so long. I have exams... the nasty things... no, not finals. My finals are in October! I can't wait for HP book 4!

Disclaimer: We all live in a yellow submarine... and some people have a lot more possessions than others... so I stole J. K. Rowling's...

'...fiat...' Draco mumbled, feeling helpless. What was he to do? Tom Riddle stood behind him, a kind of manic grin on his face, and Draco panicked.

'...fiat mer alve...'

And then, suddenly, there was a sharp pain in his hand. Draco lifted his left palm and looked at the lightning mark. Then he looked at Hermione's left temple, with the twin burn, and he realised in a sharp sudden rush that he could not kill Hermione. He - he cared about her too much. Draco slapped himself mentally, but couldn't bring himself to do it. She lay there, sleeping innocently on her side, her hair over the pillows. He tried desperately just to utter the last, fatal word, but he couldn't do it.

Was he in love?

He fell to his knees by the side of the bed, sobbing into his hands. As the hot salty water trickled over his hands, the pain disappeared as suddenly as it had arrived. Tom Riddle gave a hiss and disappeared in a puff of smoke, leaving Draco with the words Next time... next time... echoing in his head, which ached as though there were a thousand hammers pounding inside.

How could I have ever consented? Draco asked himself as he sobbed into his hands, finally running his fingers through his rumpled silvery hair, and straightening up on his knees to look at Hermione. She was still in a deep sleep, partly induced by Madam Pomfrey's tea and partly because she had been very worried, and lost much sleep. He smoothed her hair and shuddered, thinking about what he had almost done.

'Oh, God,' Draco muttered to himself. 'I am never, ever going to come close to doing something like that again.' He smoothed Hermione's hair again, and smiled a little, wiping the tears from his eyes. He bent and kissed the lightning mark on her temple. Stirring, she opened one eye slightly.

'Draco?' The voice was lost, a small whisper. Draco put his finger to his lips and she closed her eyes, smiling. She wasn't really awake, Draco realised, and he went back to his own dormitory, shaking. As he entered the room he realised in horror that he had just - had just kissed a Mudblood, and he put his fingers to his lips in disgust. Then he realised strangely that he didn't feel bad about it at all.

Shaking his fist at the ceiling, he declared, 'This is what you do to me, Tom Riddle,' and fell asleep almost immediately.

Lucius Malfoy looked down the bowl he held in his hands, a bowl made of glittering black glass filled with water that looked like slime from the blackness. In it he would soon be able to see what Tom Riddle was doing with his son. With the right incantations, soon.

He spread his hands over it and muttered some strange words, then sprinkled a pinch of silver dust over the surface of the water. It lit as though there were candles floating on its surface, and in the flickering light Lucius saw Tom Riddle materialise near his son's bed. Lucius stiffened, watching.

_ 'No...' he groaned. 'Stop it.' _

_ 'Do you really want that to happen, Draco? _

_ The pale-haired boy sat up in bed suddenly. 'Who's there?' he called, his voice shaky. And a form began to materialise at the foot of the bed. It was a dark-haired boy, a boy with sharp, malevolent eyes and handsome features. Draco frowned, recognising it vaguely. _

_ 'Draco, I am Tom Riddle,' the apparition said, becoming solid and real and taking a seat on the edge of the bed. _

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_ Tom Riddle laughed devilishly. Draco shuddered, raising an eyebrow with a snide expression. 'I want you to join me, Draco,' the boy said. He was not much older than Draco himself, and resembled Harry Potter in a way - Draco smirked, then straightened out his face reluctantly. 'I want you to join us. Your father and myself. You will be the next Dark Lord, Draco. I have no descendants.' _

_ 'Ha, ha,' said Draco composedly, although inside he was shaking. 'Me, the next Dark Lord? Think again.' _

_ 'It is true,' said Riddle, coming up closer to Draco and speaking in his ear. 'You could be great, you could have power. You could rule

the world - finally get one over on the Potter boy.' At the mention of that name, Riddle's lip curled. 'All you have to do is do what I tell you to. Your father and I will instruct you.'_

Lucius smiled slightly. This was going rather well. He looked into the bowl, the miniature versions of Riddle and Draco moving like those on a television screen, and chuckled.

_ 'I might,' he replied._

_ 'Good,' Tom replied. 'You will. Come with me.' He took Draco's hand, and at the touch of his hand a sharp pain burned in the mark on Draco's hand. Draco pulled his hand back and ran his fingers over the mark on the palm._

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_ 'Yes,' Draco said. 'Yes, I will.'_

A frown marred Lucius' icy features as he gazed into the bowl. He had _told_ Tom not to push the boy... Draco was likely to break. Still, Tom was good at 'persuasion'... Lucius smirked and looked into the bowl. And then he saw what he thought would happen. Draco, dropping his wand, falling to the ground in tears. Lucius cursed softly, looking for more, and suddenly the bowl clanged onto the table, spilling just a few drops of innocuous-looking water onto the faded mahogany surface.

His son, the only Malfoy descendant left, was actually kissing a Mudblood.

Lucius overturned the bowl as he saw Draco smoothing her hair in the white atmosphere of the Hogwarts infirmary. He knew the signs. Boreal, another of the Malfoys, had fallen in love with a Mudblood,

and lost his head. He had gone exactly that same way. None of the Malfoys ever fell in love - their wives and husbands were carefully handpicked by their parents out of a seemingly pre-cut set of people, all perfect, all pureblood. Lucius jumped out of the chair and ran up the stairs. He was going to consult his wife.

The moonlight shone once again on the halls of Hogwarts as Draco Malfoy slipped out of his common-room. He tiptoed past each classroom, a breeze ruffling his perfect silver-tipped hair, but this time he was too worried to care. He wanted some peace to be able to think. Crabbe and Goyle had been questioning him about his attitude since that night - he had been staring into space and not paying attention in even Snape's class. Draco didn't bother to answer, which only made them more curious. He stole up toward the Astronomy tower.

Treading the familiarly creaky steps, Draco let out a hooting sigh. The spiralling stairs took forever to tread carefully, and he didn't really care about being found or not. There was no one there to disturb him...

Or so he had thought. Leaning over the railing, this time without the book, was Hermione Granger.

Draco moved up, silent as a mouse, to stand beside her rather awkwardly. They hadn't spoken since she had come back to classes, and all the students had surrounded her, fingering her mark, giving Draco accusing looks. He had gotten used to it, and now held up his hand derisively whenever he came near Weasley, who always looked ready to rip his throat out. But he'd been thinking, privately, and realised that his strange feelings about Hermione were tearing his heart out. He had to speak to her.

'Hello, Draco,' Hermione said.

'Hello,' he returned. 'What are you doing here without your book?'

She let out a sigh, running her fingers through her hair. Draco thought he had never seen anyone - any girl - with such beautiful hair. Not even Blaise Zabini. 'You told me you come out here for solitude. So... I decided to try it. I've been feeling pretty torn up these past few days.'

'Too bad,' Draco said derisively, looking at her. 'You might want to try finding solace in Weasley. He's been mooning over you for years.'

Hermione didn't slap him this time, she just groaned. 'Oh, Draco, shut up. I have this premonition that something really bad is going to happen. Professor McGonagall says she does, too.'

'Characteristic of Mudbloods,' Draco said abstractedly. 'Premonitions. Superstitions. That reminds me, I have a rabbit's foot to sell - you interested?'

'Oh, _shut up_, Draco. I'm really worried.' She groaned, moonlight shining over her features, not as bright as it had the other night, but enough for Draco to see her. His breath was ragged.

'So am I,' he told her, taking a step closer to her.

'What about?' Hermione asked, finding herself also breathless.

'You,' he told her.

She laughed shortly, resting her arm on the railings for support.
'_Very_ funny, Draco.'

'I think I'm in love with you, Hermione.'

She studied his pointed features, his face, which was impassive. 'It isn't true, is it, Draco,' she whispered.

Seriously, he told her, 'It is.'

'It's going to ruin everything.'

He gave a short laugh, his eyes flashing. Hermione could have sworn they turned slightly blue. 'Yes. It will ruin everything. But... it doesn't matter, does it, Hermione? Weasley will have my head; that's all, really.' He moved closer to her, his elbow brushing hers, and she didn't know what to say.

'Draco, stop it,' she muttered, but he paid no heed; he stepped closer still.

'Draco!'

'There's nothing I can do,' he murmured, seemingly to himself. 'It's done. Father will kill me.'

'You don't really - love me,' Hermione cried wildly, looking around. 'You're hallucinating. All that Dark Magic has clouded your brain.'

Draco laughed again, a small smile twitching at the corners of his mouth. 'No, Hermione, it has in fact cleared my brain and opened my eyes to one simple fact - I can't do anything about it, I think I love you.'

'You think,' Hermione uttered desperately, clutching at straws. 'You don't know.'

'Well, I'll have to test it out, then, won't I?' His face and eyes had a kind of impervious glitter, a smile at the corners of his mouth. Hermione shivered pleasantly as he put his hand on her cheek, more gently than she had expected, and drew her face towards his despite her protests. He bent his head over hers, and she had to stop talking as he kissed her. Hermione tried to move away, but found herself putting her arms around him and holding him, as though he were actually comforting her, and she was upset. And she was, in a way. They broke apart, and Draco smiled at her.

'I thought,' he said. 'Now I know.'

Hermione put a hand to her head, rumpling her hair. Draco reached out and smoothed it down for her. 'Draco, please,' she begged, her voice not much more than a whimper. 'We can't be doing this.'

There's the Dark Magic thing and you're a Slytherin and I'm a Gryffindor and Harry and Ron will go insane and your father will kill you and...' She stopped abruptly as Draco pressed his lips to hers again, and to her annoyance found herself holding onto him. When they let go, she narrowed her eyes slightly and glared at him, hands on hips.

'Nothing we can do about it now,' he whispered as if to himself. 'It's too late.'

'Now you've gone and done it!' Hermione cried, shaking her head at him.

'Done what?'

'Draco...' Hermione paused, unable to admit that she had just realised that she loved him as well.

'What are we going to do?' she asked him as she sank onto the floor on her knees, Draco following her. 'You've got to forget this ever happened.'

'Impossible,' Draco replied. 'Anyone who's ever kissed you should know that.' He grinned at her, brushing back his pale hair, the moonlight sparkling on his glittering eyes. He moved closer to her, putting an arm around her. Hermione looked at him with a mixture of annoyance and twisted affection.

'No one's ever kissed me before - seriously, that is,' she replied, thinking of the times Harry and Ron had kissed her on the cheek and snickering at the recollection of Dean attempting a Draco-esque move on her in the common room, only to be yelled at by a very red-eared Ron.

'I should consider myself lucky,' Draco said as she finally relaxed, leaning on him.

'Draco would never do a thing like that,' Cecilia Malfoy protested.

'I'm telling you, he has,' Lucius told his wife, taking a seat on a hard wooden-backed chair. 'We are in deep trouble, Cecilia. The boy seems to be emulating Boreal. And you know what that means.'

'No!' Cecilia exclaimed, but she knew that her husband was right. The black glass bowl never lied. 'Well, then, Lucius - we'll just have to find him another girl.'

'Isn't it rather early?'

'We were betrothed at the age of sixteen ourselves, Lucius,' Cecilia reminded him.

'Oh, all right,' Lucius concurred, groaning. 'How about - that Zabini girl. Her father's a powerful one - she would make a good enchantress.'

'Yes, but...' His wife ran a hand through her hair. She had dark hair, dark as Blaise's, and pale skin like Draco and Lucius. 'How about the Parkinson girl?'

'Not very strong Dark Magic ties. In fact, I don't think the family is acquainted with the art.'

'Her mother is a good friend of mine,' his wife retorted. 'Really, Lucius, you could hardly do better. The girl is very nice - but I do not recall her as good to look upon.'

'No,' Lucius agreed. 'She's too fat.' Cecilia snorted, and told him that Pansy was only slightly pudgy now. 'I still think that Blaise Zabini is a good choice,' he maintained. 'She is very pretty, and clever as well, I believe. A good choice for him.'

With an unusually wistful look on her face, Cecilia said, 'I wish we didn't have to take such drastic measures for Draco. He's only sixteen. Are you _sure _about it, Lucius?'

Impatiently her husband went out of the room, returning with a black glass bowl filled with water in his hands. The Dark Arts bowl. Cecilia watched, her eyes wide, as he muttered the word, 'Draco'. The surface of the water lighted up, became flickering, showed Draco. The night sky was all around him. 'Let's watch him, then,' Lucius said heavily. 'We shall see.'

They saw Hermione.

Cecilia let out a gasp. Lucius turned to her, sighing. 'Did I not tell you?' he said. 'This is what will happen. Has, indeed, happened.' They watched in horror as Draco kissed the girl, and they fell asleep in a corner of the Astronomy Tower.

_ Hermione said sleepily, 'Draco, we could get into trouble.' She was leaning on Draco, both of them huddled in a corner of the tower, Draco's arms around her._

_ 'I know,' he murmured, smoothing her hair. 'But does it matter? '_

_ 'No...' she breathed, closing her eyes. 'This time we didn't get our solitude, did we? '_

_ Draco smiled, taking her hand. 'No, we didn't,' he agreed. 'But I'd rather have you here than be staring out at the stars in... solitude.' _

_ She laughed faintly, her eyes closed, her lashes on her cheeks. 'I never knew I'd ever feel this way.' _

_ 'I'm a very lucky person.' _

_ She laughed again. 'No, actually, you're not. You should have got yourself mixed up with some other, nicer girl... someone who's pretty, perfect, funny... someone who isn't a Gryffindor.' Her tone turned hard for a moment, then she relaxed. 'I don't really believe this is happening,' she told him softly. 'I think I'll wake up in my own bed, in my own dormitory, and I'll just have dreamed that I was up in this tower - and in love with you.' _

_ Draco gave a short laugh. 'I won't wake to the snores of Crabbe and Goyle again, that's for sure. Hermione... I don't know what's

happening to me. And I'm scared. I have to tell you something.' And he related his encounter with Tom Riddle, Hermione frowning slightly. 'I couldn't kill you, Hermione,' he told her finally._

_ 'I'm - I'm glad, Draco.' She gave a small shiver, strands of her brown hair waving gently in the breeze. 'I'm scared too,' she admitted. 'What is he trying to do to you, Draco?'_

_ 'I don't know,' Draco told her, 'but I think Father has something to do with it.'_

_ 'Don't think about it,' she advised him. 'I'm tired... are you?'_

_ 'Yeah.' Draco yawned and closed his eyes as well._

'Do you see now?' Lucius asked his wife, who nodded numbly. Both of them felt horrible. 'We shall have to do something about it.'

'I want you to consult that boy,' Cecilia cried. She had never felt so confused in her life. 'Tom Riddle. What is he doing to Draco?'

'Nothing, my dear, merely trying to turn him to our side.'

'But Lucius - _why?'

He gave her a look. 'Cecilia, what do you think?'

His wife sagged. 'All right, Lucius,' she uttered in a tone that boded no good. 'However, I wish for you to go easy on the boy.' Her face softened. 'Is it really wrong, Lucius, to love someone? Even if she is a Mudblood?'

'Of course it's wrong!' thundered Lucius. 'Draco is a pureblood! He can_not_ mix with her kind! It is terribly _wrong_!'

Cecilia turned her face away to hide her tears. 'It wasn't wrong for me, once.'

'HERMIONE GRANGER!'

Hermione awoke to the sound of someone calling her. Moonlight streamed onto her face, very faint now, mixing with the illusion of darkness that came just before morning. She opened one eye blurredly, and saw robes. Groaning, she opened her eyes. It's all true! she realised, feeling Draco's arms around her. She felt him stir and turned to him, but was interrupted by a teacherish _ahem_.

She looked straight up into the face of Professor McGonagall.

'Er... good morning, Professor,' she managed, looking over at Draco. He was rubbing his eyes, trying to comprehend the situation. Hermione quieted him with a finger to his lips and turned back to the professor, who was tapping her foot impatiently.

'I think we all should have a talk,' said Professor McGonagall, but in a gentle tone. Hermione wondered what she was going to do, and got up, pulling Draco along with her. They followed the professor meekly down the rickety stairs and into an empty classroom.

'Now what were you two doing up there?' the professor asked.

'How did you find us?' Draco asked, dry-mouthed.

'Filch told me,' Professor McGonagall said, a hint of a smile on her face. Hermione and Draco exchanged looks, and the professor went on to explain, 'It isn't safe to be out of your dormitories at night.'

'Why?' Hermione queried.

The professor, in answer, thumped a newspaper down on the table. Draco and Hermione gulped as they read the headline:

DARK LORD RETURNS

'This arrived early,' she said, her voice heavy with strain. 'Voldemort has returned. It is said that he is focusing on us. On Hogwarts.'

'Tom, we have to fix Draco,' Lucius explained.

The tall boy grimaced. 'Ugh. Ah well, what is the problem?'

'He's in love with the Mudblood.'

Tom's face registered shock. 'He _can't_ be! That's horrendous!' Lucius nodded, sighing heavily. 'Lucius! What kind of training does your boy receive?'

Ignoring the slight about his manner of bringing up his son, Lucius said, 'I wanted to talk to you about the attempt, Tom. Please don't push him too fast. He's easily broken by pressure.'

Tom rubbed his hands together. 'I'm planning to push him over the edge. And I know just how. You and I, Lucius,' he put an arm around his friend, 'are going to wage war. And Draco will be forced to choose between us - and her.'

A/N : Hope you didn't hate that too much. We really must get more sleep. Sherry is really tired and Taylor is dropping off. Why else do you think we would be writing about sleepy people? :) Review, please... I love those reviews... I'm sorry I didn't kill Hermione... I need some rest... bye... zzzz...

5. suspicion

> <meta> Black Glass V

Black Glass V - Suspicion

- both of us, sadly ::darker and darker::

A/N : You can recognise the handiwork of yours truly when you see a plot that is going nowhere... Well, just for the record, I'm listening to Runaway Run. One of the best songs I have ever heard! This part of the story... well, I can't really find anything to say about it. :) I've just been dancing. I am going dancing soon. I'm the

midget in Hoe Down. I'm like a head shorter than my classmates. My ballet classmates, that is. I'm taller than most of the girls in my class at school.

A/N 2 : I went dancing just now, and I dislocated my knee. Now I can't dance in the concert... Grr... it's happened 3 times in the past year. I'm not kidding. And it's my last concert, too! ::wails:: Yup, I'll have to quit... can't have my knee dislocating 3 times a year... but I love dancing in concerts! Drat... ::consoles herself with the thought of book 4, which will not be arriving until "7-21 business days" are up... dammit:: Ironic. Sob.

A/N 3 : Well, back to my story, strange stuff just kept creeping in... the bit about Draco and cologne was just screaming to be put in. My knee may have had something to do with it. ::glances at it angrily:: I must've taken Ponstan... because I'm talking like a nut. I can't stop talking, man. It doesn't hurt at all... ::grins loopily:: Yup, it must be the medication... I have been spelling "McGonagall something" as "McGonagall Something"... ::sings along to "MMMBop":: I can't stop talking! HELP! I apologise for boring you... And yes, I go cross-eyed whenever I'm over-shocked. Tom Riddle haunts me...

Disclaimer : All these lovely people belong to the wonderful J. K. Rowling, whom I shall forever envy. Book 4 is coming!
YES!

'Hermione!' Draco caught up with her as she walked along the corridor. She turned with a half-smile, greeting him.

'I'm going to meet Harry and Ron, Draco. I'd better hurry.' But despite herself she fell into step with him as he took her hand. 'What's wrong?'

'Just wanted to say hello,' he retorted, grinning. 'Does Weasley know?'

'No,' Hermione admitted. 'I'm afraid to tell him.' She brushed her hair away from her face. 'Come on, Draco, you've been teasing me about him too much.'

'He does rather moon over you, doesn't he?' Draco teased. 'But on a more serious side, Hermione - you know I received a letter at breakfast -'

'Yes,' Hermione said doubtfully.

'It was from Father. He seems to have found out - about us. And he doesn't like it.' Draco gave a short laugh. 'He doesn't like it! It was positively scathing! He didn't dare send me a Howler, because he 'wouldn't want to embarrass me'... but he's threatened to do something terrible if - if I don't stop seeing you.'

'Will you?' Hermione said softly, looking at him. He wasn't much taller than she was, but she had a way of looking up that made him feel strange.

'Oh, Hermione... I don't know. He could do all kinds of things to both of us. Your family in particular.' Draco's eyebrows knit with worry. 'You haven't seen him angry before, Hermione... but I don't

want to lose you...' His voice sounded afraid, and something in Hermione reached out to him. She had never known that he could feel before.

Taking his face in both her hands, she told him softly, 'It doesn't matter, Draco. You'll be all right. I promise.'

'You think so?' he tried to joke, shivering as she smoothed his silvery hair, reaching out to put his arms around her. She touched her lips to his, and as the kiss deepened they heard a cough behind them and shuffling footsteps. Draco turned hurriedly, but there was no one there. He turned back to Hermione.

'We'd better go,' she whispered.

'Um... okay.'

'I'll see you again tonight,' Hermione told him, and disappeared around the corner; Draco, with a last glance at her, sped off the other way.

In the shadows that the half-open classroom door cast, Pansy Parkinson leant her head against the wall as a tear trickled down her cheek.

'Where've you been?' Ron asked inquisitively as Hermione walked into the common room, a faint flush on her face.

'Nowhere,' Hermione replied, just a little too quickly.

'Hmmm.' Ron motioned for her to take a seat. 'Harry's gone to get something, he'll be back soon... Hermione, I want to talk to you. You've been acting strange.'

'Have I?' she said, just a little too flatly.

'Yeah.' Ron's mouth set stubbornly. 'I want to know what's wrong.'

Hermione sighed, running her fingers through her hair, and sat down. 'Nothing, Ron.'

'Then why do you smell of cologne?' Ron asked, his face suspicious. Hermione realised with horror that Draco must be wearing cologne.

God, why did I ever kiss him, Hermione reflected. She grinned to herself.

'Hermione...'

Harry interrupted by entering the common room. His unruly black hair was even messier than usual, and his face was rather flushed. Hermione wondered briefly why, and then thanked her lucky stars that Harry had interrupted. She didn't want either of them knowing what she was up to with Draco. Walking over to greet him, she left a puzzled Ron in his seat.

'Is that cologne?' Harry inquired. Hermione groaned. It was going to be a long day.

Harry bumped into Draco walking down the corridor to ask Professor McGonagall something for a very tired and harassed-looking Hermione. He was looking at his feet, pacing one... two... and _wham_, he slammed hard into black cloth and silvery eyes. The pale boy jumped back and stared, then dusted off his robes. '_Really_', Potter, don't tell me you can't even watch where you're going now. Continuous hero-syndrome wears down the senses. Apparently.'

Harry glared at him. 'Shut up, Malfoy. I'm going to ask Professor McGonagall something for Hermione,' he said. 'She's not feeling well.' This last was said with a cold glare straight into Draco's grey eyes.

Draco's pale face flushed a little, so that a little normal colour came into it. 'Well, allow me to be on my way,' he said lightly. 'And, Potter? Do get some decent glasses.'

Harry began to walk away, then thought better of it and came back. Grabbing a handful of Draco's robes, he demanded, 'You're not telling me something.'

Caught off guard, Draco went cross-eyed for a brief moment, then stared at Harry. 'What's the matter, Potter?' he asked. 'You wanted to hear the bit about looking scruffy enough to pass off as an Azkaban prisoner?'

'No,' Harry said menacingly. 'I want to know what you're doing with Hermione.'

The peaked face paled suddenly, so that its owner appeared, for a minute, bloodless. Draco blinked. '_What?_' he asked, his voice containing more than a tinge of suspicion.

'You know what I mean,' Harry said, coolly disregarding Draco's attempts to wrench himself free. 'She's been acting strange. Very strange. And I just realised she smells of your cologne.' He wrinkled his nose. He had to admit, it suited the pale boy, what with those designer jeans and black turtleneck sweaters that showed off his silver-blond hair... 'What've you been doing, kissing her or something?' Draco's face went even paler, and Harry groaned. 'What - you mean you've actually...'

'It really isn't any of your business, Potter.' Draco finally managed to get his robes out of Harry's hands, and glanced down at their crumples distastefully. 'But...' A note of curiosity crept into his voice. 'Why do you actually think I've been messing with her?'

'She blushes every time we mention your name. And she keeps calling you Draco.' Harry imitated his friend, glaring all the time at Draco. '"Draco - er, Malfoy - is none of your business, Harry. There is nothing going on." _And_, as I have just noticed, she...'

'OK,' Draco snapped, cutting Harry off. 'I wear it. So what?'

'Why'd it transfer itself to her? I seriously doubt that Hermione would steal your bottle out of the Slytherin common room just to put it on, Malfoy. So 'fess up.'

'Oh, get away, Potter.' Draco looked as tired and worried as Hermione

did. 'It's really nobody's business. Just leave me alone.'

'It is my business,' Harry insisted, glaring at his rival.
'Hermione's my friend.'

'I swear I haven't been harassing her, OK? Now stop bothering me and leave me alone.' For the first time Harry realised that Draco was carrying an envelope unobtrusively flat against his side. 'I want to see the professor as well.' Harry noticed again that his hair was rather over-long. 'You can go first. That way, you'll be gone earlier.'

Minerva glanced away from the slender teenager sitting on her desk insolently for a moment to look through the suspicious-looking that she had confiscated from the Weasley twins. 'Good morning, Mr. Malfoy,' she said, putting the bag in a closet. 'What seems to be the problem?' The student was looking rather pale, cold, almost, showing that autumn's end was near. Even with that damn pair of designer jeans. He twisted a lock of hair away from the corner of his eye, his fingers moving restlessly. She'd never seen him this uncomfortable before.

'I received this letter, Professor.' He held it out blindly, the green ink standing out from the slightly brownish parchment. Minerva took it in her hands, giving the boy a sharp glance. 'Rather unusual for a sixteen-year-old, don't you think?'

'What's this?' She scrutinised the ink, bright green with hints of silver. 'Draco,' it read. 'I have been thinking over your case, and I want to ask you once again to join our side... the consequences to the entire school - or the entire wizarding world - could be dire - and you could share in the profit, you know...' The professor gasped. The letter seemed to have a strange magic in it. Written by one she knew well. At each word she could almost see him smiling, using his hands to make a point... in short, it was painful.

'So he haunts you too.' The words startled her, and she whirled around to see that Draco had slid gracefully off the table and was walking towards her. 'Yes, he does have that effect in print. He sent my father a Howler for a joke last hols... you wouldn't have wanted to see it.'

Minerva read the whole letter through. It was, no doubt, from Tom Riddle - sounded so like him. He wanted Draco to join him. Join them. Rule the world. The usual... Voldemort was nearing his end. Apparently even he feared that Potter would be the death of him... He wanted Draco to replace him. And... Something struck a chord in the professor's mind. What was this about ending a romance?

'I want you to stop with that idiot of a Mudblood,' the boy had written. 'Really, Draco, I'd have expected you to have better taste. Your father and I are not pleased. This Granger scum is not worth looking at. If you don't stop meeting her, you can be sure she'll be the first to die...'

'What does he mean?' Minerva demanded of the shaking boy at her shoulder. 'Is he talking about Hermione? Have you been meeting her?'

Instantly Draco became his own rude self. 'Really, Professor, I think

it has nothing to do with you.'

'But you have been seeing her.' It was a statement, not a question, and Draco didn't try to deny it. He looked straight at his teacher, handing her the envelope as well.

'Yes, and I think Potter's onto me.'

Surprising him and herself as well, Minerva hugged him briefly. He pulled away awkwardly, but Minerva couldn't help guessing that he was glad of her support, and really frightened as well. Frightened of the dark that threatened to consume him...

'Don't worry,' she said briskly, hiding her own pain. 'It's been very good of you to come to us with it. Don't worry, it'll be all right. I'll consult Dumbledore...' But listening to her empty reassurances, Draco felt as though he were spiralling downwards into the dark.

Harry glanced back at his own footsteps in the light frost that covered the Quidditch pitch, thinking hard. He just wanted to get away from it all. Holding the Firebolt tightly, he walked to the centre of the pitch, letting the nipping wind blow his already untidy hair into a state that Hermione would have called outrageous.

Rather, she would have called Draco outrageous.

With a sigh, Harry let his thoughts spiral into the wind. Hermione having some sort of get-up with Draco... Draco, a primal fear on his icy, aristocratic features that Harry had never seen before... Ron's suspicion at the two of them, bordering on jealousy. He mounted and pushed off, jetting up into the sky, letting the speed take away all the needless tension that he'd been collecting from Hermione. In a strange flash he realised that he harboured this strange twisted affection for Draco, a kind of bond that they shared in the midst of rivalry.

Draco is a good Seeker, Harry realised, turning his broom sharply. It obeyed his every command. He often did this to relax, because he could feel something creeping up on him that wasn't exactly pleasant. He's nimble and speedy too - but, well, his heart's not really in it. Harry wondered what Draco really was interested in. Other than Hermione, of course, he thought to himself. The boy always looked so dispassionate.

He swooped across to the other side, pretending to see the Snitch. What the heck. He began to dive, his favourite action. Swooping down to earth, he didn't notice the two people hurrying out of the pitch at his arrival. One with elegantly messy blond hair and the other with perfect, in-place brown hair. Neither did he see them hurry into the gardens to sit under a tree near the lake.

Hermione shivered pleasantly as Draco's lips grazed her neck. They sat under a rather spreading tree, alone... except for the giant squid, of course, which was waving its tentacles. Draco had something to tell her... She intended to ask him about the entire cologne business, but forgot about it.

'I received a letter from Tom Riddle today,' Draco murmured, resting

his cheek on her shoulder.

Protectively she ran her hand over his hair. 'What did he want?'

Draco's tone hardened. 'Oh, the usual... he wants me to stop seeing you, turn to the dark side, kill you, Potter and perhaps Weasley, not to mention Dumbledore... attack Hogwarts, take over the world... that's all, really. Nothing to worry about.'

'Come on, Draco, you know we would never let anything like that happen to you.'

'If you can't help it?' Draco asked her, sitting up suddenly and taking her hands. 'If you can't stop him?' His voice was pleading and bitter; he seemed to be very tired. Hermione put an arm around him and forced him to relax onto the tree. 'If you can't stop... me?'

'What do you mean?' she asked him, her throat dry.

'I'm tempted, Hermione, I'm tempted. Wasn't brought up totally power-hungry for nothing, you know...'

'Oh, Draco.' She was at a loss for words. Instead she held him in silence, thoughts spinning through her head like a whirlwind. It had all happened so fast. What with suddenly getting 'involved' with Draco Malfoy, Harry's arch rival, of all people, and having to hide it from him and Ron... and being threatened by the Dark Side...

'He's out to get Harry too,' Draco said suddenly, as though he'd read her mind. 'Wants me to do him in... I don't think I hate him enough. That sucks. But I live with it.' He crossed one slender ankle over the other, and Hermione remembered that he had been called a 'male supermodel' by Parvati Patil once... he certainly was attractive. Silver-blond hair that touched his collar - a pale, peaked face - saucy air. Hermione smiled down at him as he closed his eyes, thinking.

With sitting under a tree, however, during the beginning of winter come freezing limbs, and soon both Draco and Hermione were shivering with cold. Yet they didn't want to return; they wanted to be resting forever, with nothing at all to worry them. They wanted some solitude, as Draco was so fond of saying, they wanted peace and rest. No Tom Riddle. They held on to each other, trying to get warm; Draco told some joke about the inclement weather which made Hermione giggle. She closed her eyes too, her lashes drifting onto her cheeks. It was Draco's turn to hold her then, trying futilely to comprehend why he had fallen in love with a Mudblood, why he had turned his life into such a darned mess. Whyhe enjoyed it. Enjoyed being normal for a change. Enjoyed actually being in the close company of a Mudblood.

He cradled Hermione closer, looking down at her, and he knew why.

Lucius sat with Tom on a hill near Hogwarts, looking out over that large castle. Tom was playing with a leaf that had floated down from a tall oak, twisting it in his long, thin fingers. Lucius looked at

the lake of Hogwarts, the two small, faraway, innocent figures beside it, the other students who ran along the lighted corridors. Soon it would all be his. His brow darkened at the memory of Draco and Hermione. His son had better not disgrace the Malfoy name...

'Lucius,' said Tom, breaking him out of the reverie. 'I have an idea.'

'What's that?' Lucius snapped, thinking of Cecilia, his wife. Had she owed Mrs. Parkinson yet? 'What plan?'

'A cold spell over Hogwarts,' Tom explained, his eyes glinting. 'Snow. Thick, blanketing snow. Delightful if you ask me. I always loved a good snowfall... They'll be dumbfounded, of course. What else? Ah well... let's get to it. Freezing. All have to stay inside. Perhaps we can even hope for a good spell of illness. Speed up winter a little.'

Lucius had to acknowledge that it was a good idea. 'Ready,' he said, raising his wand.

Tom raised his hands, as he needed no wand - he was very powerful. He and Lucius began to mutter the incantation, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Bolts of light shot from them and surrounded the castle, creating a kind of cloudy fog. And then it began to snow.

As the two prepared to Apparate away back to someplace warm, Lucius dimly saw the two figures begin to stir.

Draco stirred in dreams... he'd fallen asleep again. It was cold. He was trudging through black shimmering stuff... it was so cold... cold...

And he woke up covered with a light dusting of freezing snowflakes, still cradling Hermione in his arms. She too was covered loosely in snow, resting on her eyelashes and hair and the tip of her nose.

'Hermione,' said Draco, his voice tremulous with cold, 'it's freezing.' She opened her eyes, shaking off some of the dusty snowfall, looking around with wide eyes.

They stood up slowly, watching snowflakes tumble down softly, huddling for warmth. Hermione's cold hands encircled Draco's neck. He shivered. The lake had abruptly frozen over, and the squid was resting peacefully underneath. The trees were beginning to frost. A strange misty fog was lifting a little. Draco pulled Hermione fully to her feet and, twining his hands in her hair, whispered in her ear, 'We'd better run back to the castle.'

They ran towards the school, then slowed to a walk. It was snowing so hard that they couldn't see. Moving on slowly, Hermione kept her hold on Draco as she stumbled and almost fell. Draco steadied her, then halted. 'Hermione... it's too much. I can't see.'

Slowly her hand came up to touch his face, as though she were a blind girl trying to find out his expression through touch. It wandered over his eyes and nose, then rested over his mouth. Draco kissed her fingers lightly, then took hold of her hand. 'Let's call for help,'

Hermione suggested, her voice soft and choked with the cold, squeezing his hand. 'We'll never find our way back.'

'Yes we will,' Draco told her. 'We have to. Or we'll freeze.'

'I'm already frozen,' she muttered softly, allowing Draco to gather her into his arms, warming her slightly. 'Draco - we'll never get back.'

'Anyone out there?' Draco called loudly, coughing. It was too much, this freezing, blinding torture that he was going through. He felt Hermione's hands snaking round his neck, clinging to him. He pressed closer to her. He couldn't see, could hardly move. His whole body was beginning to ache with the cold. Everyone else would be inside the castle... what about classes? It was near the Christmas holidays, and they had been given a little break as the teachers were working in secret on the Tom Riddle case.

There was a light over there! Draco tugged Hermione towards it, both stumbling in the misty snowfall that was chilling them to the bone. It got closer... closer... Draco was sliding on drifts of snow, sinking foot-deep, trying to hold up Hermione as she fell, coughing, and stumbled on. They fell right over on a protruding stump, and the light bobbed further and further away.

Just as they began to give up hope, they fell into a room with wooden boards for the floor and a lamp on a table, colliding hard with a tired, cold Quidditch Seeker...

As the door swung shut on them, Harry and Draco let out a yell. 'Aargh!' Hermione slipped, shivering, her eyes closed, to the cold floor.

A/N : Um... I'm sure you wouldn't want to know what's happening next... it's kinda weird. Oh well, at least I'll be able to cry on command now... I have to act as the victim in a bleep case... and cry as well... :) Well, sorry for taking so long... I had exams, truly! Hope you enjoyed this and didn't mind my blinking chatter, and... please review?

6. portals

> <meta> Black Glass VI

Black Glass VI - Portals

- Taylor

A/N : Hi, guys. I'm feeling strange again. Please bear with me... and please review... I just got Harry Potter 4 and it was wonderful... I am now even firmer in declaring that Ron and Hermione were meant for each other... but I still love toying with Draco, the poor boy.

That most beautiful of quotes : "John, put on a decent shirt or Benjamin's parents will think you're gay!" - because John was wearing a girl's shirt...

A/N 2 : The poor boy is now in another state. Praised be. Not for

long though... ::thinks gleefully of a very cruel
friend-insertion::

Disclaimer : All of them belong to J. K. Rowling... blether, blether,
blether

'What the hell are you doing here?' Draco grumbled, glaring at Harry, who glared back. Between them lay Hermione, her eyes closed and her breathing shallow. 'We'd best warm her up, Potter. She's frozen.'

'So are you,' Harry said pointedly, looking at Draco's bloodless face and shaking hands. 'Go and warm your hands at the lamp. It's the only warm thing in this place. I'll try to get her round.' He bent over Hermione as Draco edged closer, looking at her wan face, her eyelids that flickered rapidly but never opened.

'I said go and warm your hands, Malfoy!' Reluctantly Draco moved over to the lamp, holding his shivering hands over the flame, and feeling a searing pain. Harry was rubbing Hermione's hands in his, shaking her gently, calling her name. Her eyelids fluttered weakly and stopped. 'Her hands are freezing. Bring that poor excuse for a light over here.' Draco carried it over, looking out of the small glass window at the wind and snow howling outside. 'Thanks. What were you two doing out there, anyway?' Harry wrinkled his nose. 'Ugh! She smells of your cologne _again_! Malfoy, I'd swear on my Firebolt that you were kissing her.'

'Mmm,' Draco said noncommittally, rubbing her hands in turn.

'Malfoy...'

'OK! OK! So I did kiss her!' Draco exploded suddenly. 'Why do you have such a big problem with that?' He began to shake Hermione furiously. Harry stopped him with a hand to his arm as Hermione's eyes opened. Harry himself had rather wide-open eyes at this revelation. Malfoy, kissing Hermione? He had to be joking...

'Hmm?' Hermione said bemusedly, shaking her head slightly. 'It's so cold...'

Soon the three of them were huddled in a corner for warmth, Hermione in the middle and each of the boys at her shoulder. Harry and Draco glared malevolently at each other, Draco's fingers twined in Hermione's with her head resting on Harry's shoulder. The snow showed no sign of letting up.

'So where are we, anyway?' Hermione asked timidly, seeing the boys glare at each other.

'I don't know,' they responded simultaneously, then glared at each other. It was this empathy towards each other that made Hermione uneasy, a kind of sullen fraternity; tempers short, yet tied together somehow. This was making them extremely brusque. Getting up, she looked around, leaving the other two on the floor to collapse onto each other, knock their heads together, then jump up in turn, looking in disgust at the floor. The table was plain wood. Outside it was still snowing madly, and the little room where they were imprisoned was the remains of an old hut.

'We've got to get out,' Hermione muttered.

'How?' both boys asked at the same time, then glared. Harry ran his fingers through his already-mussed hair. 'I guess we'll just have to wait it out. There is absolutely no way that I am going to be able to get outside in this.'

'Protection spell?' Draco suggested, but Harry shook his head.

'I tried that, but it didn't work, because this snowstorm isn't an ordinary one.'

'I wonder will Ron come?'

Draco laughed shortly. 'Him?' Hermione whacked him lightly on the arm. 'Oh come on, Hermione, you know Weasley would freak at the sight of us in the same cabin.'

'He would not...'

'I think he would, Hermione,' Harry said softly. 'You know, this whole Draco thing is driving him bonkers.'

'Why should it?' Hermione asked defiantly, but she was flushing a little. 'Why should he mind what I do in my private time?' Draco was looking from Harry to her, a strange expression on his pointed face. He didn't say anything.

'He minds, Hermione,' Harry told her. 'He cares about you.'

'Then he should mind his own business!' Hermione insisted. Draco's silver eyes flitted from Harry back to Hermione, resting on her.

'He's jealous,' said Harry flatly.

Hermione flushed darkly, and said nothing.

'Hermione,' Draco whispered in her ear, 'are you all right?'

'No,' she said with a small sigh, 'but I'll be all right. I'll be all right. We have to think of some way to get out of here.'

They stared out of the open window bleakly, wondering when and how help would come.

Professor Minerva McGonagall hurried along the corridor, footsteps echoing along the cold stone walls. In her hand she held the letter, Tom Riddle's letter to Draco. She walked fast and almost blindly, seeming not to notice the cold and annoyed poltergeist who zoomed off in disgust, wondering why he could not get a rise out of the stern professor today. She spoke the password and entered her office, sitting down at the desk and opening the letter once more.

Tom Riddle. His entire personality jumped out as she reread the letter, light glinting off her glasses. A nagging feeling of cold made itself vaguely known, but she ignored it, and sat straight-backed in the chair uncomfortably. It was very like him... all the words could have been him, standing in front of her and

mocking her. She could almost see him now.

How old was he now, and what was he like? She had never seen him, only Potter and Dumbledore, and perhaps Cedric - but she remembered him, and that memory was painful. Calmly and quite deliberately she placed her hands on the parchment and pulled.

It tore satisfyingly, and Minerva threw it into a corner -

- only to have it zoom back onto the table, whole again.

She cursed softly and looked out of the window. Snow was still falling.

Draco slept fitfully, his eyelids flickering and his mind spinning. He turned slightly, Hermione beside him, and his foot landed on a board. The sound that ensued was a loud hollow knock.

Draco awoke suddenly, his grey eyes wide. That hollow sound -! He crawled slowly over to the board and Hermione collapsed gently onto Harry. Happens a lot, Draco thought sourly, rubbing the sore spot on his head where it had connected with Harry's glasses. He knocked on the board.

A hollow sound rang dully around the four walls.

Draco lifted the loose board slightly and discovered a small pouch. Pushing his slender fingers through the gap, he pulled it out gently and replaced the board. Curious, he opened the pouch, finding small silver Sickles and one strange black, shimmering stone. The stone was icy cold and he dropped it hurriedly. It rolled along the wooden floor, coming to a stop at Hermione's feet.

'Wellforheaven'ssake...' He let out a frustrated breath and picked it up, wincing. He'd heard of this thing, heard his father talking of it, and he knew what it was - an Opener.

'Open up,' he tried, and nothing happened.

'Alohomora,' he whispered.

There was a freezing gust and suddenly the boards in the middle of the floor disappeared as though they had never been there before. Instead there was a gaping hole, and slowly, very slowly, stairs began to form in the hole. Draco jumped back hurriedly and fell right over, landing on top of Harry. There was a muffled gasp and then a loud groan. Harry sat up and Draco rolled off him, clutching his ankle.

'Malfoy -!' Harry stopped suddenly, and Draco knew that he had seen the staircase. 'But how -?'

Draco held out the black stone, switching it from hand to hand and wincing a little. 'It's an Opener. Someone stowed it in the loose board over there -' He pointed, and as Harry's gaze followed his finger, realised that there were no boards there. 'Never mind. Potter, we should have a look.'

'OK. And wake her up - we can't leave her here alone.'

'Always the little gentleman,' mocked Draco, but all the same he bent gently over Hermione and shook her awake. She blinked, her eyes opening, and Draco helped her to her feet. Harry was surprised to find a pang of what could only be called jealousy run through him.

'Thought you were going to do the Sleeping Beauty act,' he said rather nastily to Draco, who looked at him puzzledly. Hermione was shivering again. Draco explained the stairway to her in an undertone, and she nodded, taking the stone from him and holding it in her hands. He protested, and Harry found himself feeling rather nauseous as Draco insisted on burning his fingers. Still, it was rather amusing to see Draco so attached to her.

They descended the staircase slowly, Harry first, holding the lamp, then Draco and Hermione. They walked alongside each other, pale-faced. The stairs ended and they walked into darkness, illuminated eerily by the lamp. The shadows of light that flickered across Hermione's face took on a life of their own, illuminating the hollows and curves of her face. The flickering lamplight seemed to have a perverse attitude towards Draco, though - his pale thin face looked as though it had been carved out of stone, especially those granite eyes. Their steps rang out and suddenly they were at a well, with shimmering black water inside. There was a bucket in the depths.

Draco felt for the pouch with the coins in it. Dry-mouthed, he held it out to Harry. 'A portal, I think,' he mouthed, seemingly unable to produce any sound. Hermione took his hand reassuringly. 'Drop one in and state your destination. I think this is a plan - my f-father...' His muttering grew softer. Harry nodded, but before he could toss a Sickle into the well Draco stopped him with a hand to his arm. 'I want to do something, Potter, just hand me a Sickle.'

Harry gave him a silver coin, and the slender boy tossed it in, bowing his head. A strange light came from the depths and went out. Harry had never seen him so serious before. His silver hair drifted over his face as he straightened. Giving him a curious look, Harry threw a Sickle into the dark water and called out, 'Hogwarts!'

Nothing happened.

'Jump in, Potter.'

Harry looked at Draco, then all three joined hands and stepped onto the edge. They sat down, then slid into the icy water. It was cold... so cold...

The last cognisant thought Draco had was: Damn!

Draco came to in the Gryffindor common room. He lay by the fire, his hair half-wet, next to Harry and Hermione, who were still unconscious. The other Gryffindors were clustered around Harry and Hermione, but none seemed to want to touch him.

He sat up with a groan, and the Gryffindors gasped. Then finally they surrounded him cautiously, asking, 'How did you get here? What were you doing? - You just appeared like that - Professor McGonagall's coming, Lavender just went to call her...'

Professor _McGonagall?_ Draco thought. He groaned again. His head ached like there was no tomorrow. He crawled over to Hermione and realised with horror that she was holding the stone, and her fingers were blistered.

'Oh Hermione no should have put it down,' he muttered incoherently, a string of words floating out of his mouth effortlessly. His ability to speak in complete sentences had apparently disappeared. Her fellow Gryffindors stared at him in disbelief as he pulled the stone out of her hands and winced as it burnt his fingers.

'What are you _doing?_' breathed one of the Gryffindor girls, who had always irritated Draco. Irritably he replied:

'Handling a dangerous Dark Arts stone, so back off or I'll throw it at you.'

The Gryffindors gasped and moved away. Draco was rather perversely pleased. He watched as Hermione's eyes opened, her lashes fluttering lightly. He drew a breath, knowing that if he let one little word slip from his mouth around her the Gryffindors would be all over him.

His life would be officially over.

She sat up, and then Harry's eyes opened as well. He sat up straight away, then began to blink rapidly. Doubtless he was feeling as horrible as Draco was. His fellow students crowded round him, leaving Draco alone, trying to escape the pounding in his head that seemed to _want_ to spin incessantly round and round and round for God's sake when would it all be over?

He crawled out of the portrait hole and up to the Astronomy tower. It was the only place he could think of to sleep off this veil of misery.

He and Harry recovered rather quickly from the light-headedness - only an hour for Harry, and three for himself - but it was not the same for Hermione. She spent two days in the infirmary. Draco realised that he _had_ after all been exposed to the Dark Arts rather more than he had thought, and Harry of course... Hermione, on the other hand, had never really been exposed to the Dark Arts. It was rather like the first ride on an aeroplane.

'I'm here to visit Hermione.' The little spiel with the lamp didn't seem to have let up yet - his face seemed even more sharp-featured and cold than ever. Ron gave him a sharp jab in the ribs and he amended reluctantly, '_We're_ here to see Hermione.' Madam Pomfrey let them in with a rather reprimanding air. She, like the rest of the school, had heard the stories about them being caught in the storm with Hermione. Rumours abounded. Harry was taking it rather well - the school knew he was a respected Gryffindor, and hadn't he saved them from Voldemort more than once? No, Draco got all the suspicion, dirty jokes and dark looks from Hermione's many friends. Perfect Potter with his perfect reputation.

They stood by her bed, not speaking. She had not yet woken up. She looked so perfect in her sleep, Draco thought. She might not be drop-dead gorgeous, but still, she was enough for him. He knew Potter

knew it, and it was the only reason he let Draco come along when they visited her. He'd never be able to get in alone. Ron was taking him along, albeit reluctantly, because Harry had a detention with Snape in the dungeons.

Ron took her hand. 'Hermione,' he said, his voice soft.
'_Hermione_.'

'Let her sleep,' Draco interposed. Ron gave him a dirty look, but subsided. They stood there, looking at her. Draco felt very foolish, then realised it was not good to feel foolish around a - _Weasley_. He felt the old smirk return to his face, then hurriedly straightened it out. 'Maybe we should talk to her.'

'_Talk_ to her? You going barmy? She's unconscious!'

'Haven't you heard anything on medicine?' Draco said in a lofty tone, not betraying how his voice was threatening to shake. 'It apparently helps people in comas.'

'What's a -' Ron caught himself just in time. 'All right then - if it'll help.' The boys knelt beside her bed together, still not saying anything. Draco felt very awkward.

'Go on, Weasley. She knows you better.'

Ron muttered, 'I'm not so sure about that any more,' and clutched her hand, whispering into her ear. Draco thought he saw Ron's lips form the words 'Iloveyou' but couldn't be sure.

A thought came to him then. That well - Tom Riddle must be using it as a portal into Hogwarts! Horrified, Draco burst from the hospital wing, skidding around the corridors, looking for Professor McGonagall.

And he had forgotten to tell her... and he had _forgotten_ to tell her...

As Ron watched silently from beside the white sheets, a single tear dropped onto Hermione's pale hand.

A/N : There's a screw loose in my head! Sorry about the wait, guys, I had enormous writers block and an overdose of Dizzy Up The Girl. I hope you enjoyed that.

End
file.